

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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December 4, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, we celebrate the second Sunday of Advent. The Scripture readings of today's mass offer us a vision of a people transformed by God and empowered with the many gifts of the Holy Spirit to live a life worthy of our calling. They call us to be involved in this process of our transformation by repentance and change of heart - conversion of our attitudes, change of our behavior patterns, maintaining harmony in the community, doing good for others, looking out for other's needs, resolving conflicts and tension amicably, using God-given gifts to benefit others in our communities, etc.

The first reading (Isaiah 11:1-10), gives us an inspiring vision of God doing something radically new for his people by giving them a king empowered with virtues beyond ordinary human understanding. At the time Isaiah shared this vision, Ahaz was king of Judah (735-732 BCE). He was weak in many ways. In his desperation, he tried to forge a political alliance with foreign powers in order to fend off a hostile takeover of Judah by Assyria. Isaiah counselled against such alliance and encouraged Ahaz to rely on God and God's way. Even after the Assyrians had invaded, the prophet urged fidelity to God rather than military might and support of allies.

Isaiah describes the power and the virtue of the promised king in whom the promise of God would be fulfilled. The spirit of the Lord will bless and empower this chosen king to be a man of virtue beyond all ordinary human understanding. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him and empower him with gifts (Isaiah 11:1-10) – we know them today as the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Church's tradition lists seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord, as described in this excerpt from Isaiah (Is. 11:1-2). Isaiah saw them as God's gifts to the king for the service of his people. We see them today as gifts for the common good - for the benefit of the community, and not for personal gain/profit. This list of gifts does not imply that there are no other gifts from the Spirit of God. There are as many gifts as there are people. The list could be seen and understood as inclusive of all gifts that God gives to each of us. It is up to each of us to open ourselves, discern and discover our own gifts with which we are gifted. We are gifted persons, a gifted community and a gifted Church. We are gifted with the Holy Spirit and spirited with His gifts. Let us be grateful. The Holy Spirit calls us to develop these gifts, share them with others and use them for the service of the community.

Paul had appealed to the community in Rome to learn to live not for themselves but for others, to look out for the good of the community. Following the example of Christ, Paul says, we should please our neighbor “so as to do him good by building up his spirit” (Romans 15:1-3). In today’s reading (Romans 15:4-9), Paul instructs them to maintain harmony in the community, to create a sense of fellowship, to resolve conflicts and tensions amicably and live a life of unity in Christ. He invited and encouraged them to extend this fellowship to all people, not only the Jewish converts, but also to the Gentiles because God loves all people. Because God’s mercy is offered to all, the Christian community must reach out to all in compassion and love. It is a timely advise for all of us in the context our life today.

In the Gospel reading of today (Mathew 3:1-12), Mathew describes John the Baptist as heralding the coming of Jesus and calling people to “repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” – at hand meant, here and now...it is happening now and so there is an urgency to repent and prepare now. John shared his vision of what this preparation had to be. He described that vision in beautiful poetic language, “Prepare the way of the Lord...make straight his paths.....produce good fruit as evidence of repentance....”

John’s vision was not about a geographic transformation of landscape, but a transformation of a people who will experience salvation in Jesus. He called his people to level what needed to be leveled, make straight what was crooked and make smooth what was rough in their lives. Today, we are challenged to change what need to be changed and bring about a transformation of our life in Christ.

John lived a simple life and claimed nothing for himself, neither did he draw people to himself. He made it clear to them that he was not even worthy to untie the sandal straps of the Messiah. He saw his mission as preparing the way of the Messiah. He called people to conversion and to wait for the good news. He announced the coming of someone who will baptize with water and the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist inspires us to be humble and be at the service of others in serving God. He calls us to give God first place, to seek God’s honor. He calls us to point to Christ, to draw people to Christ rather than to our own self. He challenges us to step aside and let Christ take over and fulfill his mission in and through us, just as he did.

Let us begin this second week of advent with a deep desire for repentance – for a change of heart and a transformation of our life in Christ. Let us gratefully use all our God-given gifts for the benefit of others. Let us respond to the call of John the Baptist and strive to “prepare the way of the Lord...make straight his paths... and produce good fruit as evidence of our repentance....”

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Second Sunday of Advent

December 4, 2022

**In this season of Advent, we are called to expand the horizons of our hearts,
to be amazed by the life which presents itself each day with newness.
In order to do this, we must learn to not depend on our own certainties,
on our own established strategies, because the Lord comes at a time that we do not imagine.
He comes to bring us into a more beautiful and grand dimension.
(Pope Francis)**

Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
may no earthly undertaking hinder those
who set out in haste to meet your Son,
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom
gain us admittance to his company.
Who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah describes the power and the virtue of the promised king in whom the promise of God would be fulfilled. The spirit of the Lord will bless and empower this chosen king to be a man of virtue beyond all ordinary human understanding. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him and empower him with gifts.

The Church's tradition lists seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord, as described in this excerpt from Isaiah (Is. 11:1-2). Isaiah saw them as God's gifts to the king for the service of his people. We see them today as gifts for the common good - for the benefit of the community, and not for personal gain/profit.

The list of gifts, as seen above, does not imply that there are no other gifts from the Spirit of God. There are as many gifts as there are people. The list could be seen and understood as

inclusive of all gifts that God gives to each of us. It is up to each of us to open ourselves, discern and discover our own gifts with which we are gifted. We are gifted persons, a gifted community and a gifted Church.

We are gifted with the Holy Spirit and spirited with His gifts. BE GRATEFUL. The Holy Spirit calls us to develop these gifts, share them with others and use them for the service of the community.

Psalm 72

This Psalm is a royal psalm in which the Israelite king, as the representative of God, is seen as the instrument of divine justice and blessing for the whole world. The king is human, giving only what he has received from God. Hence intercession must be made for the king. It is a prayer that God's justice will rule from sea to sea, to the ends of the earth and to the boundaries of the civilized world known at the time.

**O God, with your judgment endow the king,
And with your justice, the king's son;
He shall govern your people with justice
And you afflicted ones with judgment.**

Romans 15:4-9

Paul had appealed to the community in Rome to learn to live not for themselves but for others, to look out for the good of the community (Rom.15:1-3). In this excerpt, he instructs them to maintain harmony in the community, to create a sense of fellowship, to resolve conflicts and tensions amicably and live a life of unity in Christ. He invited and encouraged them to extend this fellowship to all people, not only the Jewish converts, but also to the Gentiles because God loves all people.

Because God's mercy is offered to all, the Christian community must reach out to all in compassion and love.

Mathew 3:1-12

Mathew describes John the Baptist as heralding the coming of Jesus and calling people to "repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" – at hand meant, here and now...it is happening now and so there is an urgency to repent and prepare now. John shared his vision of what this preparation had to be. He described that vision in beautiful poetic language, "Prepare the way of the Lord...make straight his paths.....produce good fruit as evidence of repentance...."

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Prepare the way of the Lord...make straight his paths... level what needs to be leveled, make straight what is crooked and make smooth what is rough in your life. May you experience a transformation of your life during this season of advent.

John lived a simple life and claimed nothing for himself, neither did he draw people to himself. He made it clear to them that he was not even worthy to untie the sandal straps of the Messiah. He saw his mission as preparing the way of the Messiah. He called people to conversion and to wait for the good news. He announced the coming of someone who will baptize with water and the Holy Spirit.

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Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the day, December 4 - St. John Damascene and 19 other saints are remembered this day.

John was a Byzantine monk and priest, born and raised in Damascus around the year 675 or 676. He received a classical and theological education and followed his father in a government

position under the Arabs. After a few years, he resigned and went to the Monastery of Saint Sabas near Jerusalem and spent most of his life in this Monastery.

Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions and Eastern Catholic traditions have been particularly shaped by his insights. Among Eastern Christians, St. John is best known for his defense of Christian sacred art, particularly in the form of icons. While the churches of Rome and Constantinople were still united during St. John's life, the Byzantine Emperor Leo III broke radically from the ancient tradition of the church, charging that the veneration of Christian icons was a form of idolatry.

St. John began publicly opposing the emperor's command against sacred images in a series of writings. His argument was that Christians did not actually worship images, but rather, through them they worshiped God, and honored the memory of the saints and that by taking an incarnate physical form, Christ had given warrant to the Church's depiction of him in images.

He is famous for his treatise, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, a summary of the Greek Fathers, of which he became the last. He is known as a poet, one of the two greatest of the Eastern Church, the other being Romanus the Melodist. His devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and his sermons on her feasts are well known. He died at his monastery, Mar Saba, near Jerusalem on December 4, 749.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**The Lord is coming, always coming.
When you have ears to hear and eyes to see,
you will recognize him at any moment of your life.
Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord.
(Henri Nouwen)**